

Ladner, Cuevas among oldest Coas

Ancestry gets new attention

By KEN FINK

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Mattina, Creel, Mavar, Rosetti, Desporte, Swetman. All old Coast families, right?

Well, correct, but certainly not the oldest.

As the Tricentennial puts a focus on the Coast's history, some families can trace their roots and ancestries to the day discoverer Pierre LeMoyne, Sieur d'Iberville, set foot here.

A variety of family names represent the diversity of cultures that have shaped the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

But they all had to start somewhere.

Hancock County historian Charles Gray explains it this way in regard to one of the first true Coastians: "Christian Ladner had 12 children. One daughter married Ron Cuevas. From them, there are 63,000 descendants. Do not pick a fight with a Cuevas or a Ladner unless you can muster an army."

Some of the earliest residents came to the Coast aboard one of Iberville's three ships — Le Marin, La Badin and Francois — with names such as Corco, Ladner, LaFontaine and Saucier.

By 1800, there were only about 48 families, or 700 or 800 people living between the Pearl and Perdido rivers.

"They married each other, they married the Indians," Gray said. "They were all French or Spanish, and they were all Catholic. There were no schools, no churches, no law."

With illiteracy came name changes, many believe. Ladnier changed to Ladner, Sassier to Saucier, Favre to Farve, Morin to Moran. People began spelling

their names the way they sounded.

Land was as abundant as seafood. But before the railroad and the rise of seafood exports, the Coast's population remained stable.

"Jacques Maturin Ladner was the first justice of the peace in Biloxi even though he couldn't read or write," said Nap Cassibry, historian. "He had two sisters. One married Jean Baptiste Fayard, and the other married a Corco. Between the two sisters and brother and their husbands, they owned all the land between Hopkins Avenue and Point Cadet."

Until 1721, people and supplies had to be unloaded at the barrier islands because the Mississippi Sound was too shallow.

When Iberville's brother Bienville began settling New Orleans, that became a more accessible port.

"From 1721 on, virtually all traffic to the Gulf Coast from Europe stopped," Gray said. "It went to New Orleans. The families that lived here became stagnant."

After the Louisiana Purchase, and just before Mississippi became a state in 1817, the land was opened to settlers. That brought a huge population of Anglo-Saxon Protestants from the middle eastern seaboard — with names such as Gray, Higgins, Cole, Evans and McCrae.

Many settled near Pascagoula, but some eventually made their way across the Coast, stopping at the Bay of St. Louis 100 years before it was bridged, then moving around the north of the bay.

What did perhaps the most for the Coast's population was the railroad in 1870.

The railroad did two things for population growth in Biloxi and Bay St. Louis.

First, it created a new way to get seafood to markets across the South and beyond, bringing in more French settlers,

Yugoslavian immigrants and Italians.

Families with names such as Baricev, Sekul, Mavar, Covacevich, Mattina and Desporte set-

tled during the 1800s, many making their living from the shrimping and seafood business.

On the other end of the Coast in Bay St. Louis, New Orleans

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businessmen were then able to take their families to Bay St.

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Louis for the spring and summer, themselves commuting back and forth to New Orleans, making it to Canal Street in about an hour.

The Villeres, deMontluzins, Necaises and Toulmes eventually settled in the Bay.

In Ocean Springs, where the first settlement started, families entered the industries of seafood, oranges, charcoal and pecans.

Life was simple and pleasant, and families stayed.

Those who remain are descendants of that era — with names such as Krebs, Catchot, Beaugez, Graveline, Seymour and Bellman.

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